Activity Snapshot Analysis

Estimating digital assistance provided by Digital Champions

INTRODUCTION

Citizens Online's approach to digital inclusion, Switch, is built around the provision of assistance with digital skills provided by a mixture of Professional, Volunteer and Embedded Digital Champions. Digital Champions (DCs) help individuals (End Learners or ELs) understand the benefits of using the internet, and can show them how to do simple things online.

Professional DCs are dedicated outreach workers who are recruited by an organisation, partnership or by us at Citizens Online to work solely as a Digital Champion. Volunteer DCs are recruited and trained by an organisation or partnership to support digital inclusion work, but are unpaid. We emphasise the valuable role played by Embedded DCs, who work in a specific role (such as a Job Centre Plus, Citizens Advice branch, or an HR or training department) but who integrate Digital Champion work into this role.

RATIONALE

Citizens Online works with Digital Unite to support people to become Digital Champions through the Digital Champions Network (DCN), which provides learning, tools and a friendly community. We encourage DCs to utilise the DCN's session- and tally-based Activity Records, but we know from qualitative anecdotal experience that the DCN doesn't capture the full range of DC activity. Without further analysis, however, we have little idea what proportion of activity is captured by the DCN. Whether for reporting to our Key Performance Indicator targets with funders, or in order to internally evaluate and improve our projects, we want to know how many people are benefiting from the support of Digital Champions we have employed, trained or recruited to the DCN.

PROCEDURE

We developed a different method to estimate the number of people helped: an Activity Snapshot, where we would ask DCs to record basic details about interventions for one week, using a tally chart (either inputting to a spreadsheet or a printed form). We have now run three Activity Snapshot weeks:

- 12-16th September 2016, completed by a total of 39 DCs
- 16-22nd April 2018, completed by a total of 54 DCs
- 15-21st April 2019, completed by 23 DCs

SUMMARY FINDINGS

Although there are some differences between the three snapshots – for example, the 2016 survey covered four projects, the 2019 survey only one – and the estimates were calculated in slightly different ways each time, we can draw some conclusions.

- We believe the respondents helped at least 47,000 people over the three years.[1]
- Of the total 116 responses, each DC helped 10 people a week on average.
- Embedded DCs helped on average three times as many people as Volunteer DCs.
- DCs recorded as few as 0 to as many as 69 ELs helped in a week, including up to 24 in a single day.[2]
- We estimate that – including active DCs that did not fill in the snapshot – **around 68,000 people were helped across the four projects.[3]**
- The snapshots provide us with more information about the work DCs do. In 2019, for instance, "Foundation"[4] tasks were 52% of all activities recorded.

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[1] This figure is the sum of annualised estimates associated with each of the snapshots, and does not account for people helped by DCs who continued to help people in years they did not complete snapshots. We also have no data from Plymouth and the Highlands for 2018 and 2019, nor data for Gwynedd for 2019.

[2] Recorded by one Embedded and one Volunteer DC in Highland in 2016, a Brighton and Hove Embedded DC in 2016, and a Brighton and Hove Embedded DC and Professional DC in Plymouth in 2016, respectively.

[3] As with the earlier estimate, this figure is based on the sum of the annual estimate for each of the three years, not the full programme duration and project extent.

[4] The Essential Digital Skills Framework details the Foundation skills necessary for people to use devices.

The exercise confirms our view that only a proportion of activity is recorded, either by the snapshot or by the DCN

- The 2019 snapshot contained an example where one particular DC had recorded four activities on the snapshot recording form, but had only recorded one of those four on the DCN. This suggests that the snapshot process enables and encourages DCs to record their activity in a way that they do not generally do via the DCN.
- We think the activity recorded in the snapshot is between 14-20% of the *potential* DC activity, if *all* trained DCs were as active as those participating in the snapshot.[5]

Table 1: Summary of Activity Snapshots and responses

Snapshot	Total responses	Total Training Sessions	Individuals helped	ELs per DC
Brighton & Hove 2016	14	147	138	9.9
Gwynedd 2016	5	95	93	18.6
Highlands 2016	17	239	234	13.8
Plymouth 2016	3	154	148	49.3
Brighton & Hove 2018	38	361	335	8.8
Gwynedd 2018	16	131	115	7.2
Brighton & Hove 2019	23	85	68	3.0
Total	**116**	**1,212**	**1,131**	**9.8**

Table 2: End Learners helped per DC, all vs embedded vs volunteer

Year	ELs per DC (all)	ELs per DC (embedded)	ELs per DC (volunteer)
2016	15.7	16.6	4.2
2018	8.4	8.8	4.7
2019	3.0	3.8	1.9
Total	**9.8**	**10.7**	**3.4**

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[5] We don't expect all trained DCs to undertake activity at the same rate as the most active DCs, this estimate is a reflection of capacity: what might be possible were they to become so.

Table 3: Calculations of annual numbers of End Learners receiving support from DCs

	2016	2018	2019
Number of projects in snapshot	4	2	1
DCs in snapshot	39	54	23
Total trained DCs in snapshot projects	266	295	235
Annualised estimate of ELs helped by snapshot respondents	24,520	18,040	4,080
Annual ELs estimate based on trained DCs	35,957	25,342	6,844

The annual EL estimates presented here use a standardised methodology for each snapshot, based on several assumptions.[6] First, we make an annualised estimate of ELs helped by snapshot respondents, which simply multiplies the snapshot totals for a 40-week year (for the 2019 snapshot, we also adjust the estimates to take account of the relative quietness of the sample week). For trained DCs who did not take part in the snapshot the process is slightly more complex:

- Trained DCs are a subset of the total DCs recruited in a project, those that have completed a training course on the DCN or equivalent face-to-face training.
- Having subtracted the number of DCs who completed the snapshot, we combine the number of each type of trained DC by the average number ELs that type of DC helped in the snapshot (e.g. 61 non-snapshot VDCs in 2019 helping 1.9 ELs/week = 117 ELs).
- For non-snapshot DCs we reduced the level of estimated activity to one-tenth the total of those who completed the snapshot, on the basis that snapshot respondents are the most active DCs (i.e. the above 117 ELs becomes 12).
- Finally, we again apply calculations to make annual estimates (and in the above example, the number of ELs becomes 18 to adjust for the quietness of the 2019 week).

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[6] Citizens Online has previously analysed the snapshots from 2016 and 2018 using slightly different methodology, and the numbers presented here supersede those earlier estimates.

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY AND CAVEATS

We wanted to use the snapshot as a sample from which we can gauge as accurate an estimate as we can about how the total number of people being supported by DCs in these projects. There are several questions we needed to answer in order to help us derive annual estimates from the snapshot samples:

1. How typical is the snapshot week in terms of activity level?
2. What proportion is the snapshot DCs sample of all active DCs?
3. How representative are snapshot respondents of trained or active DCs overall?
4. Does the snapshot recording process affect levels of activity recording?
5. How many weeks per year is a DC active, on average?

In all cases, we do not have easy answers, but we can make informed estimates based on what we know of typical DC activity, and based on what DCs tell us about their work.

1. HOW TYPICAL ARE THE SNAPSHOT WEEKS?

On the snapshot forms, DCs are asked to indicate whether the snapshot week was typical for them, and if not, whether they would ordinarily expect to be more busy or less. Across the three snapshots, we have a clear picture that the snapshots have been an overall underestimate of activity *by the DCs involved* (let alone the DCs who did not participate).

In 2016 and 2018 we can be confident that the numbers are a minimum estimate, because no respondent indicated they were more busy than normal, or expected to be less busy in future. In 2016, 31 of 39 respondents (79%) said their week was typical. The other eight all said they were less busy than usual. In 2018, 37 of 54 (68%) said it was typical, with 16 (30%) saying it was quiet (Easter holidays and sunny weather) and one saying it was busier than usual. None of the DCs expected their activity levels to be lower in the foreseeable future. Notably, in this snapshot one of the professional DCs in Brighton & Hove was on leave and thus their (usually relatively high) count of sessions was missing.

For 2019 the estimate is particularly low, and we have applied a factor in our calculation to reflect this. When we asked respondents to tell us how many people they would normally work with in a typical week, 13 of the 23 respondents (57%) told us it was a quieter week than normal, while the other 10 said it was about average. One of the main

reasons for this was the snapshot being done in Easter week when many venues were closed on the Friday. The timing of the snapshot during the April holiday period has two effects: fewer sessions are open to learners, and fewer learners are likely to attend sessions. DCs noted that several of their usual attenders did not show up. The Easter weekend is likely to have been much quieter as well, though relatively few sessions are recorded at weekends anyway. While 85 activities were actually recorded in the 2019 snapshot, the DCs reported that in a more typical week they would expect to provide around 160.

Therefore we have used a "quietness factor" of 1.5 in our 2019 calculations - while retaining the assumption of 40 working weeks per year.

2. WHAT PROPORTION IS THE SNAPSHOT SAMPLE OF ALL TRAINED DCS?

In 2016, the 39 DCs in the snapshot represented 15% of the total of 266 trained DCs. In 2018, this increased to 18% (54 of the total 295 trained DCs); in 2019, the 23 DCs were just 10% of the 235 trained champions. These rates are quite low, and we don't know how reliable they are as a guide to the activity levels of DCs who did not complete the snapshot. This is why we have applied a factor of one-tenth to the estimates for non-snapshot DCs.

3. HOW REPRESENTATIVE IS THE SAMPLE OF DCS IN THE SNAPSHOT?

We do not know how many of the trained DCs are actually active over the course of a year. As a result, it is hard to know what the total number of DCs the sample is supposed to be representing is. We have used the total number of trained DCs as this is something we know, but not all trained DCs are likely to be active. Again, this is why we have applied a factor of one-tenth to the estimates for non-snapshot DCs.

There is some overlap between recording on the DCN and in the snapshot. During the 2019 snapshot, seven DCs were actively recording activity on the DCN: five of these were also participating in the snapshot but two were not. This shows that the snapshot does not cover all the activity that is taking place; but equally there is no evidence here of a great amount of activity recorded on the DCN without being captured by the snapshot process.

We assume that the DCs completing the snapshot are more likely to be those with the highest levels of activity and enthusiasm for their role. On the other hand, a DC with a very high level of support activity might find that they cannot keep up with recording all of it – whether for the DCN or the snapshot. It is, admittedly, impossible to distinguish from the outside between a DC who is not actively providing support, and one who is active but too busy (or disinclined) to record their activity. Most DCs not providing support during the snapshot week would be unlikely to complete a blank form, though a few did. We only have data to show the "average" DC conducting a few sessions in a year, which implies that they are inactive most weeks of the year.

Importantly, while on many aspects the snapshot is likely to provide an *underestimate* of total activity across a project area, in this respect the sample is assumed to be skewed towards including DCs whose activity levels are *higher* than most.

4. DOES THE SNAPSHOT PROCESS AFFECT LEVELS OF ACTIVITY RECORDING?

While some DCs may be able and inclined to record this kind of brief activity when given the specific request to do so as part of the snapshot, it is understandable that they might not feel able to take the time to do so in other weeks – even if they are one of the DCs who regularly records more substantial pieces of support on the DCN.

We expect that the snapshot process encourages a higher rate of *recording,* per DC involved, to that which occurs in other weeks of the year, but can find no reason to suggest that it affects the level of *actual* activity. The snapshot may particularly encourage recording of the shortest interventions, including around Foundation skills – given logging in to the DCN to do this may feel excessive.

5. HOW MANY WEEKS PER YEAR ARE DCS ACTIVE, ON AVERAGE?

We have chosen to use a figure of **40 active weeks per year** as a basis for calculating annual DC activity. Professional and embedded DCs, who are providing help as part of their job, are likely to be active most weeks of the year. While Volunteers are probably not active for 40 weeks, we don't believe it is necessary to adjust for this, given we already reduce the estimate of activity for DCs that didn't complete the snapshot.